

## RAC Notes

### June 4-5, 2003

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Attending: Kelly Adams (Wed), Ken Sanders, Jeff Baldwin, Chris Christiansen, Garth Taylor, Pat Avery (Wed), Bob Bronson, Steve Thorson, Mel Quale

Not Attending: Shaun Dustin, Gwen Montgomery, Kent Christopher, Loyd Briggs, Dennis Crane, Morgan Evans

BLM staff attending: Jim May, Fritz Rennebaum (presenting), Carol McCoy-Brown, David Howell, Bernie Jansen (Wed), Debbie Kovar (Wed), Rick Vander Voet (Thurs), Ray Brainard (Thurs), Scott Barker (Thurs), Jack Sept (Thurs)

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### Wednesday meeting

*BLM Organizational Issues (Fritz Rennebaum):* Since K Lynn Bennett's installation as State Director, there have been a lot of phone calls to him about potential areas where BLM could become more efficient. Fritz was tasked with visiting with various constituencies about what issues should be considered by the State Director. Potential issues:

- Travel: Not just for the staff, but also for constituents to visit with local BLM offices.
- Socioeconomic centers: Where do people shops and look for information?
- Staffing: What are our labor costs?
- Budget: How are we spending \$\$? Is the money being spent where they were intended?
- Co-locations/Co-management: Primarily with the Forest Service, but perhaps with other agencies. Right now this District has co-located facilities in Shoshone and Idaho Falls, with additional plans in Pocatello, Twin Falls, and Burley.
- Zoned staff: Scarce skills located in a central location, rather than specialists in each field office.
- Scattered land vs. blocks of land. How best do we manage them?
- Political Considerations: Congressional delegation coordination is very important, as well as local counties and state legislators.
- Boundaries: Eight years ago, did we design some units that are too large for ensuring proper regulatory or natural resources management?

When talking with constituents, Fritz generally got quality responses related the resource management, which was very helpful. He asked for RAC members' feelings on the subject. RAC members noted the problems of a large district, including having scattered staff that report to the District Manager in Idaho Falls. Some questioned whether efficiencies had been gained since the three Districts were consolidated in the mid-90s.

Fritz discussed the fact that there had been some feeling among key interests that there should be a fourth BLM District in South Central Idaho. This also garnered a positive response from RAC members. **Among the RAC's questions on this subject:** Would the existing USRD RAC be

split to form two RACs, what kinds of additional expenses for staffing would a new District create, and are the benefits of a potential District split based on getting better resource management or is it a customer service issue?

*National RAC Meeting review:* Chris passed out a copy of the national agenda, and a list of the RAC Chairs from around the national who attended. Much attention at the meeting was focused on noxious and invasive weeds. Chris mentioned that it was good to meet other chairs from around the country and compare notes on issues.

*RAC Annual Work Plans:* Dave Howell presented. **The RAC suggested that the Annual Work Plan needs to be more fleshed out to be an effective tool.** What are the deadlines for the projects that BLM has? Can the annual work plan give the RAC an idea about what's coming up that year? Some items are monitoring, some require projects, etc. Try to be specific as to what role you want us to play in each issue. Where definitive deadlines are available, plug them in. On other items that are more nebulous, that may be harder. **Dave will revise Annual Work Plan for fall meeting.**

*North Rim:* Review of process for North Rim project plans. After local interests and consultants put together a management proposal, the group applied to the BLM for a Resource and Public Purposes (R&PP) Lease for the area. There are still some administrative hoops to jump through, including publishing the proposed R&PP lease, in the *Federal Register*. As part of the project, there are some private and state lands that we would like to acquire through exchange or easements. Devil's Corral is a piece of property we would like to acquire through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (BLM must compete with other federal agencies for funding). Some of the areas would be set aside for protection, and some would be allowed for development.

*Grant proposal for wood products:* Steve Thorson reported on a grant idea through Utah State University for strengthening riparian areas. Potential use in the Goose Creek area. Steve will apply for the grant, and coordinate with Burley Field Office.

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## Thursday meeting

*Sustaining Working Landscapes:* Jim May reviewed the high points of the policy as presented in the April 23 listening meeting in Burley. The Director has issued a memo to the State Directors to hold RAC meetings in August or September to gather feedback.

- **ACTION** → Summary of the Listening meetings from April. Is there one available (Jon Foster, Jack Sept)? (*Will be distributed in late July, prior to August meeting.*)

*Weeds:* Review of National RAC Chairs' meeting's high points, including 10-15% number (infestation of public lands). Weed control, without an emphasis on weed eradication, is only

prolonging the problem. Most of the solution boils down to dollars and time. Partnerships with cooperative groups and counties go a long way on the local level. **The RAC provided the following suggestions for improving weed management at the national level:**

- Educational programs may be of use, if widespread. (PSAs and signage).
- Weed-free hay program needs to be picked up again, and emphasized throughout BLM.
- ATV Groups: Need to educate, and may need to provide accessible wash stations
- Internal Education (to Feds and Industry)
- OHV Planning needs to be a component of RMP planning.
- Partnerships with conservation groups
- Partnerships with schools, student programs.
- BLM-wide Awards program.
- State of Idaho has “Project Wet” for stream & river education, “Project Tree” for forestry issues. Should there be a “Project Weed” for this issue that can be introduced as a piece of the curriculum? (Baldwin: a workshop where the teachers get free stuff and are sold on the idea is usually better than a state mandate to incorporate into the curriculum.)

**Recommendation from Ken Sanders:** Three Idaho RACs should encourage Idaho Department of Ag to fund the vice-Secretary position and weed-free hay program. (Ken, you may need to carry this forward to the RAC at the next meeting.)

- **ACTION →** How much money is being spent in the District on weed management?  
**Chris Christiansen** will contact LeRoy Cook and Arn Berglund for information.

*OHV Idaho Strategy:* Mel Quale gave a review of the May 14 meeting with Terry Heslin, BLM’s Statewide OHV coordinator. RAC is supposed to provide comments on the OHV strategy by the end of the month. Statewide RAC Subgroup will meet again with Terry in July.

**How the RAC can help:**

- Help develop public service messages for statewide application. Possible messages:
    - Use existing roads and trails
    - Cross-country travel isn’t necessary, or cool
  - Assist with Travel Management Planning
    - Provide recommendations on locations, sequence, timeframes.
  - Help develop Best Management Practices (BMPs) for OHV Management
  - Help BLM identify how to manage OHV “Hotspots”
- **ACTION: →** BLM Rec Planners need to get with **Mel Quale** on present OHV problems. Jim suggested BLM facilitate a conversation with Field Manager, RAC members, and Rec folks.
  - **ACTION: → Dave:** Rec planners can identify (and have previously) specific hot spots, along with RAC members. Chris’ list is a place to start. Check against Garth Taylor’s list.

*S&G Review (statewide):* Russ McFarling reviewed Erv Cowley's presentation on the statewide S&G review. *Documentation* emerged as a significant issue in the team's assessment – that ID teams' meetings & findings were not always recorded, existing data on file for each allotment were not always consulted before doing an allotment assessment (so that a clear picture of the history of the allotment could be crafted), and so on. BLM brought together its employees in a multiple resource workshop in April to discuss this review, issuance of grazing determinations, and role of sage grouse conservation.

The Field Managers in the USRD will be meeting on or about ~~July 24~~ (***Meeting is now scheduled for July 30 in Idaho Falls***) to begin a consistency review in our own District, and **any members of the RAC who are interested should plan on attending** (Carol McCoy Brown will make a contact with Ken Sanders on the meeting date). Another concern we have is in ensuring that a quality assessment and determination is made on the allotments that really need it, but we are increasingly pressed to keeping to the ten-year implementation schedule. Monitoring should be a major consideration to determine whether progress is being made. The reality is that it's not happening, and can the RAC help us figure out the best way to do it? These are areas where it is important for the RAC to step into the fray on this issue. **Potential subgroup:** Ken Sanders, Bob Bronson, Chris Christiansen, Kelly Adams, Dennis Crane (?), a permittee not on the RAC.

- ACTION → Ken Sanders suggested that this is a possible topic for the next RAC Executive Session: how do we (RAC) want to be organized and focus attention on an issue – particularly this issue?
- ACTION: → Get date fixed for Field Manager/RAC meeting (Carol McCoy Brown)

*Forest Service Coordination:* Jim summarized what is currently being done:

- Co-locations: Minimal coordination between the two agencies, but it's the "camel's nose under the tent" approach, in that sitting together is the first step to coordination. The Idaho Falls Field Office is co-located, the Pocatello and Malad offices will be later this year, and the Burley office will be in the future.
- Joint Operations: Dispatch Centers are an example where the two agencies are working closely together. Idaho Falls has an operation that has worked very well for the last seven or eight years, and the Shoshone Dispatch Center is now a joint operations center.
- Interagency Agreements: Formal agreements in place that allow for cooperation. An example: the South Fork of the Snake River is one area with a Joint Activity Plan where the agencies work together to make decisions on facilities, funding, etc.

The RAC suggested other areas where the BLM and the Forest Service should be working together:

- Sharing resources (technical specialists, training, etc.) can and maybe should be done together.

- Decision coordination, especially grazing: When a decision is made by one agency that a grazing turnout is going to be delayed, the other agency is left holding the bag; this can be remedied by coordination.
- High visibility, public events/initiatives are a means of showing that the agencies are working together (use grazing, recreation, weed control as potential launching points).
- If the agencies are serious about addressing resource concerns together, perhaps they should be looking at watersheds.
- Would inviting Ruth Monahan and Jerry Reese to a RAC meeting to talk about “one single issue” help to increase the quality of coordination – weeds, perhaps? What about other agencies, where they have a stake in the outcome of the issue? Would bringing Tom Dyer back for a workshop to talk about where gains may be made help all agencies to work more together?

Ken Sanders suggested that Kelly should send a letter to the three forest supervisors (Ruth Monahan, George Matejko, and Jerry Reese). This can be an item for brainstorming the next meeting.

➤ ACTION: → Add to agenda for next meeting.

*Wind Power:* Scott Barker gave an update on the Cotterel project. In the scoping period, we heard comments about sage grouse as a potential conflict, and we went back to re-examine. Because of this, the company’s environmental examiner will add studies to collect data on bats, raptor migration, small mammals, and sage grouse. The latest lek study showed that there are more leks than anticipated, and about 50 breeding males use the area.

Suggestions from the RAC:

- Knowing all the potential conflicts, we understand that there are not a lot of clear answers; so monitoring will be a significant piece of this particular project in whatever form it takes.
  - Idaho Fish & Game’s local office has concerns about potential impacts, but no one knows what actual impacts there will be.
  - Is there some kind of economic analysis in place, or a plan for decommissioning the towers if they are no longer needed?
  - Come November we should have more information that will help make a better decision?
  - Bonding – will they be required to bond?
  - Is the company interested in the subsidies, or are they in it for the long haul?
- ACTION: → Dave and Scott work out a list of those on the RAC who are interested in the issue and a possible tour before the next meeting.

*Craters of the Moon Planning Process:* Mel summarized the ID Team meeting, and indicated that the team had a good range of potential alternatives. One thing that pleasantly surprised him is the large amount of attention being paid to analyzing public comments. In the next two weeks, we should have a (very) rough draft (about 80% of the plan EIS) together. Jeff Baldwin

(Subgroup chair) is coming in the next two weeks to discuss cost-benefits, and select a preferred alternative; this is a small group that will be meeting. The preferred alternative is for analysis purposes only, and may or may not be the final outcome. Craters interdisciplinary team will brief K Lynn on July 1, along with regional director of NPS, both with supporting staffs.

- ACTION: → Dave – talk to MJ about getting sample resolutions. Jeff was concerned about making sure we use them when there's an opportunity. Jack Sept suggested that they should not be lengthy.

*Portneuf-West Bench Environmental Assessment (EA):* The Draft EA has already been to the national level once for review, and they called for revisions. The second draft went to the national level on Tuesday. There is one final Forest Service requirement that we will need to follow – release of a preliminary final EA for a 30-day review. If all goes well, we should be able to have a final in place in time to start treatments in the fall. Treatments are expected to take up to nine years to complete.

*Pocatello Resource Management Plan (RMP):* Scoping has begun, and we are looking at a finish date in 2006. We have had two meetings, one tonight, and two more next week. RAC should encourage folks to come to the meetings, and members should give individual comments as well. Scoping period ends on June 30.

#### *Executive Session:*

Most items had already been discussed at this point. The RAC suggested putting together a list of the major projects and timelines so that they may make comments and suggestions when appropriate.

- ACTION: → Dave to modify planning chart, add Portneuf, Windland, and other stuff. General direction on where the RAC inputs are needed.

DM Update: Jim will be retiring on July 1, and expressed his appreciation to the RAC for the valuable advice he has received. // Wendy Reynolds, new Burley Field Manager will be on board on June 16.

NEXT MEETING: August 27-28 in Idaho Falls. Will focus part of one day on Sustainable Working Landscapes.